The Charles Williams Society

Newsletter

No. 87 Summer 1998

The Charles Williams Society

The Society was founded in 1975, thirty years after Charles Williams's sudden death at the end of the Second World War. It exists to celebrate Charles Williams and to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information about his life and work.

Members of the Society receive a quarterly newsletter and may attend the Society's meetings which are held three times a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at Kings College London.

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For information about the **Oxford** reading group please contact Brenda Boughton, tel: 01865 515589.

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From the Editor

Many thanks to those of you who got in touch after the last Newsletter offering encouragement and constructive criticism – all of your remarks were appreciated. As some of you pointed out, there were a number of small errors in the text of issue 86, for which I apologise.

Perhaps the most significant of these errors was actually in the subscription reminder that was enclosed in the Newsletter. Those of you who have already paid your subscriptions for 1998/99 please ignore this, but for anyone who has yet to pay, please see the note on page 6.

I must also apologise for not managing to include in this edition a list of back copies of the Newsletter, as promised in issue 86 - gathering this information has proved more time-consuming than I originally imagined. I hope, however, to be able to publish this list in the very near future.

The Society intends to set up a CW Web site later this year. If, like me, you are somebody inexperieneed in information technology, I recommend Andrew Williams's article on page 29 of this edition. Andrew explains very clearly what the internet is, what a Web site is, and the potential uses and benefits of setting up our own website.

There is a good chance that CW will be mentioned from time to time during the celebrations of CS Lewis's centenary happening around the

world this year. Many people may well be prompted to want to find out more about CW as a result, and we can be sure that some of them at least will search the internet for information. What better time for the Society to embark on this new venture?

Best Wishes,

Mark Brend

Charles Williams Society meetings

- **Saturday 14th November 1998**
  Dr Andrew Walker will speak on "The Narnia Tales of CS Lewis". The meeting will start at 2.30 pm in the Church Room of St Matthew's Church, St Petersburgh Place, Bayswater, London (nearest underground stations: Queensway and Bayswater). Please note that there is not much heating in the Church Room - if the weather is cold, dress warmly.

- **Saturday 27th February 1999**
  Planned for 2.00 pm in St Matthew's Church Room. Please note that the time is 2.00 pm and not 2.30 pm as stated in the last edition of the Newsletter. This is because it is hoped to show the video of a recent performance of Charles Williams's *The Masque of the Manuscript* and *The Masque of Perusal*. Details will be published in the next newsletter.

- **Saturday 5th June 1999**
  Annual General Meeting at 12.00 noon in the Church Room of St Matthew's Church. At 2.30 pm Grevel Lindop will speak on "Charles Williams, Robert Graves and the White Goddess".

- **Saturday 16th October 1999**
  Bishop John V Taylor will speak on The Doctrine of Exchange. The title is to be confirmed. The meeting will take place in Pusey House, Oxford at 2.30 pm.

Council meeting

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 28th February 1998.

- A provisional booking has been made at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, London, for a Conference on 16-17th June 2000.
- The Chairman will represent the Society at a private performance of CW's *The Masque of the Manuscript* and *The Masque of Perusal* at the Oxford University Press on 16th May to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Music Department. Mrs Diana Sparkes, daughter of Hubert Foss who wrote the music for the Masques, has generously presented the Society with a copy of a specially printed edition of the music and words. Mrs Sparkes has also promised to give the Society a video of the actual performance. Council hope that it may be possible to show this at a future meeting of the Society.
- Council decided that it is necessary to increase charges for back copies of Newsletters for both home and overseas members. Details will follow in a future newsletter.
- It is hoped that the Society will be on the Internet before the end of this year although our Web site may at first carry a limited programme (see page 29).

New members

A warm welcome is extended to the following new member of the Charles Williams Society:

- **Mr Robert Morgan**
  Brynderwen,
  41 Forest View
  Mountain Ash,
  Mid Glamorgan, CF45 3DU

Subscription payments

Subscription payments for 1998/99 are now due. The rates for individual/joint members are:

- **UK members: £10/£15.**
- **UK concessions: £6/£9**
- **Overseas: £12/£17 or $22/$30.**

Mrs Sharon Battles

Sharon Battles, a long-standing American member of the Society, sadly died in October 1997.

We extend our sympathies to her husband Baron, who writes -

"She loved Charles Williams' works and found great pleasure in research at the Wade Collection in Wheaton, Illinois and at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, England."

MR James

Members may be interested to know that the Ghost Story Society plans to place a memorial plaque to MR James in the parish church of the village where he spent his boyhood: Great Livermere, near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

Members would be welcome to attend the unveiling during the weekend of September 12th 1998. For further details please contact Clive Ward: 01543 307151.

National Portrait Gallery Display

We are delighted to announce a forthcoming showease-display to be held at the National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, London, on The Inklings. It will include Anne Spalding's lithograph drawing of Charles Williams.

The exhibition will run for about six months from July 18th 1998. It will be in Room 27, The Early 20th Century Galleries, on the first floor. For further details telephone the gallery on 0171 306 0055 (Fax: 0171 306 0056).

We hope that as many members as possible, and their friends, will be able to visit this exhibition, which promises to be very interesting. It would be a very good thing if those visiting it, if they find it enjoyable, would express their appreciation (and interested comments) to the Gallery, verbally or perhaps in writing (to: The Curator of 20th Century Collections). Works on paper, such as Anne's drawing, need care and are not exhibited for more than six months at a time. We may therefore hope that, if interest is known to exist, it will be shown again in the future.

The Unorthodox Orthodoxy of Charles Williams

The following paper was delivered by Professor Charles A Huttar at the Society's AGM, 31st May 1997.

Early in my editorial work on *The Rhetoric of Vision*[1], I had an exchange of letters with a contributor who had written of Charles Williams's "heterodoxy" and, indeed, made quite a point of this supposed fact. I objected, believing (as I still do) that it is important to perceive Williams as solidly Christian in his outlook and teaching. I could see the writer's point,[2] but I felt that if the word "heterodox" is to be used - let alone "heretical," which also is sometimes uttered - it may not be done casually, as if to imply "as everyone knows," but has to be carefully qualified.

Sometimes it is said fearfully or in warning: "Beware! Do not be led astray by this dangerous fellow". Sometimes it is said exultantly or hopefully: "He may appear to be Christian but he's really one of us after all, one who doesn't let himself be confined to all that". Whichever way it is said, I think it false.

That correspondence I have continued to reflect on in the succeeding years, and I now take the opportunity of this paper to try to sort out some ideas about the concept of orthodoxy and its variants, how Charles Williams stands in relation to them, and what we may learn from him about larger matters that are at stake. My first step was to reread *The Descent of the Dove*, and, as a result, much of this paper takes the form of a re-examination of that remarkable book, that "fantasia on church history" as Brother George Every called it,[3] with the particular focus that my topic implies. I will look back also on *He Came Down from Heaven*, published in William Heinemann's series "I Believe" in 1938, to which *The Descent of the Dove* in the following year may be said to be a sequel. There,

Williams was not so much using a historian's approach, piecing together a narrative from many sources, but rather, in the main, re-reading and interpreting one source, the Bible, and thus tracing a history of sorts from the Garden of Eden down to the Ascension. Yet one feels he wants to push on into the age of the Church, and in fact he does so selectively with a long passage on Dante - but then observes, "The Church, as such, will be the subject of other volumes of the series, and is not to be discussed at length here."[4] Thus if he wished in 1938 to discourse of the Church, it must be under other auspices. And that might be, in part, the story behind *The Descent of the Dove*.

I doubt if I have any startling or important discoveries to offer, but even for those of you more familiar than I with the *Descent of the Dove* and Williams's other works, I hope it will afford some pleasure to think about them once again.

To begin with, I shall seem to contradict myself. Charles Williams was, certainly, unconventional - and thus, in one legitimate sense of the word, heterodox: "unusual," "not in accordance with accepted opinion or usage."[5] The problem of course is that when the word is uttered in a more serious, academic, analytic context (as in the essay submitted for my book collection it surely was), it is inevitably understood in a more technical way and supposed to be the next thing to heretical, holding an "opinion or doctrine contrary to the orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church."[6] Many readers, and some writers, do not always use words, especially technical terms, with precision. Charles Williams I think did; but too often, shades of distinction are ignored. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* in its reporting of contemporary usage takes cognisance of such equivocation. *Orthodox* means "holding correct, or currently accepted opinions," and, of the doctrine itself, "correct, in accordance with what is accepted or authoritatively established." Heterodoxy is "deviation from what is considered to be orthodox". What we shall find true of Charles Williams is that he had a keen sense of the difference between an idea's being "currently accepted" and its being "correct" in any but the sneering sense modified by "politically"; between what is "accepted" and what is "authoritatively established"; between what is orthodox and what is con-

sidered to be orthodox. But any word that can be defined with such an equivocal "or" has lost much of its usefulness as a precise instrument of communication. And yet one further question looms on our horizon: what did Williams perceive to be the relation between orthodoxy and truth?

Let us look more closely at his history. *The Descent of the Dove*: a perfectly straightforward title, so long as one knows what the Dove symbolises; and if not, the subtitle will explain. The subtitle, however, is anything but straightforward: *A Brief History of the Holy Spirit in the Church*. The concept of history and the concept of the Holy Spirit are antithetical. History is told by stitching together fragments of what has been seen and reported, using threads of inference that are themselves based on our knowledge of what effects come from what causes, according to the best of our poor experience: but you can't see the wind. It blows where it will, unconcerned with charts and tables of cause and effect. To undertake to write a history of the Holy Spirit's operations is paradoxical and audacious and, strictly, impossible; yet no more impossible than to tell the history of the Church without somehow (even if imperfectly) taking those operations into account.

The nature of the Church itself is the reason this is so. The Church is a divine institution and a human institution. The word *institution* has come to be heard almost entirely as a noun, a present existence, with never a thought of the verb behind it. Institutions are what a sociologist of one sort studies, using surveys, organisational charts, and the analysis of power relationships. Such methods have been applied to the Church in its human aspect, and properly so. But they are incapable of capturing the entire reality. God in Christ *instituted* the Church, and God the Holy Spirit goes on *instituting* it, and the institution that is the product of these mysterious actions does not stand open to any investigative methods social science has yet devised.

Yet this institution, Christ's body, "that great and holy mystery" or, in Williams's own words, "itself one of the Secrets,"[7] is a kind of incarnation; which means that in its human aspect it is fallible and frail. The Church can err,

has erred - in encouraging racism, in siding with the powerful against the powerless, in dividing itself and, at times, shedding blood to preserve the division, and in a thousand other ways, not excluding doctrines. For whenever wrong praxis evokes not repentance but rationalisation, the Church itself is in danger of becoming heterodox.

I like to think that Charles Williams would not have dissented from these observations. My own sense (subject to correction) is that of all the different strands of thought over the years that have contributed to shaping these views of mine, by no means the least important have been those I have learned from reading Williams - accurately, I hope. That he knew the paradoxical nature of his undertaking is conveyed in the first paragraph of *The Descent of the Dove* when he speaks oxymoronically of "the measurement of eternity in operation." My description of the Church as at once human and divine is not far distant from one of the recurrent themes in the *Descent,* that the work of the Church is "the redemption of a point . . . *now*" (*Dove,* 14) or (he has many ways of phrasing it) "The Reconciliation with Time" (ch. 2 title) of this entity originating from outside time, in order that time may be finally caught into eternity: "the conversion of time by the Holy Ghost" (15).

For my next point, that the Church being human has often failed to live up to being the Church, abundant support can be provided from Williams's writings. He tells us that "in the Apostolic Age itself, that time which the Church was to redeem was already becoming the bane of the Church. . . . The Kingdom - or, apocalyptically, the City - is the state into which Christendom is called; but, except in vision, she is not yet the City. The City is the state which the Church is to become" (*Dove,* 15). He does not even find this state of affairs surprising (nor should he, if the fact is a corollary of our humanness). Christ himself seems not "ever to have hoped much from officers of a church" (*HCD,* 108). In forcing obedience on "the half-converted masses" instead of winning assent from fully converted souls, Christianity in the Middle Ages "betrayed" its own highest knowledge - "as, since St. Peter, it was always doing" (*Dove,* 155). In the Inquisition

the Church "deliberately accepted a mode of action" contrary to "the Kingdom towards which she aspired" (107). Around the same time, the sack of Byzantium signalled a "civil destructiveness within Christendom" which would bear more bitter fruit in the Religious Wars of the West four centuries later (112).

But these are errors in the realm of praxis. What of belief?

Williams was, of course, well versed in the history of theology, that is, in the Church's struggle to define orthodoxy by setting the boundaries outside which a belief cannot be called Christian. He is very clear that there are such boundaries. Christianity didn't fit the Roman expectation, that here was one more new religion among many. "Its credal intolerance was . . . shocking" to them - "as," Williams slyly adds, "it is to-day" (*Dove*, 17). The Fourth Gospel shows the impact of Greek philosophy as far as it is "permissible" to do so and rejects "the impermissible" (*HCD*, 59). Heretical views, then, are identified. Gnosticism, Manicheism, Nestorianism, Arianism, and more - Williams faithfully recounts their place in the early centuries, why they were attractive, and why they were not acceptable, not within the pale.[8] But he also notes how some of them, at least, proved remarkably hardy, long after orthodoxy had been forced to define itself more sharply over against them. "Even now," he was to write two years later, "in spite of the Athanasian Creed, the single existence of the Incarnate Word is too often almost Gnostically contemplated as an inhabitation of the flesh by the Word."[9] And in the same year as *The Descent of the Dove* he wrote in a book review, "Ever since it had rejected the Nestorian idea of a merely moral union of the two natures in Christ, [the Church] had been committed to a realistic sense of the importance of matter," yet "the dichotomy which orthodoxy turned out of its official dogma has continually returned in its unofficial language." Later in the same review, Williams speaks of "our unofficial Manicheism" that has infected what "the official representatives of the Church" say "about such things as sexual love." He says that what made D. H. Lawrence an enemy of the Church was the errors of Christendom itself - that segment of it visible in his time and place - whose "morals aimed at a docetic Christ, and the awful creeds recalled them in

vain."[10] Such has been the fatal attraction of those ways of viewing life which the Church was clear-sighted enough to anathematise in its early years but now in these latter days lacking the passion, often, even to protest when they seize the popular mind within the Church itself. Nor is this a phenomenon peculiar to these latter days; but some of its earlier appearances we shall wait to consider in a different context. In relation to such mistaken ideas of what orthodoxy is, Williams may well seem unorthodox (in the popular sense), not marching in step with the rest of the crowd; but when the crowd is following a beat that is unorthodox in a deeper sense, might not the one out of step deserve instead the name of teacher or prophet?

"The definition of heresy," Williams writes, "involved an obstinate persistence in a particular opinion against the known authority of the Church."[11] His immediate context is medieval witch-hunts, but I believe the definition is more broadly valid. If so, those in our day and in many eras before who hold to ideas popularly but mistakenly thought to be Christian, as described above, may be acquitted of heresy even though the ideas themselves are wrong. Their plea is ignorance: the hungry sheep are not believing against the *known* authority of the Church (and presumably, if properly instructed, would not continue *obstinately* to do so), for the Church has presented a divided *authority*, on the one hand the firmness of Scripture, creeds and tradition yet (lamentably, on the other hand) the all too often contrary voice of its behaviour and its informal teaching. When the Church *has* succeeded, at points - whether in the making of creeds or in other actions—in uttering the truth, that, Williams would say, is the other side of its dual nature: it is the Holy Spirit doing its (his, her) work.

That work is a leading of the Church step by step - not all at once - to a perception and enunciation of what is to be believed. One of the themes echoing through both *He Came Down from Heaven* and *The Descent of the Dove* is that of the growth of doctrine. In the *Descent*, we first encounter the word *heresy* in this statement: "From the point of view of the Jews Christendom was nothing but a Jewish heresy" (*Dove*, 5). There *had* already been revelation. But "at a particu-

lar moment, and by no means secretly, the heavenly Secrets opened upon" the gathered disciples and the Church began (3). There had already been revelation, but it was partial, and it would continue to be partial, so far as their ability to grasp it was concerned. Williams reasonably says of St. Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ," that "however inspired [he] may have been, it seems unlikely that he comprehended in a flash the whole complex business of Christian theology" (*HCD*, 65). For one thing (we might add), if he had, why would he leave the Church to struggle over centuries towards the same comprehension? The difficulty the rich have in entering the Kingdom was, it appears, revealed to the disciples: Christ told them in so many words. But can it be said to have been revealed, if they failed to grasp it? Williams discusses this scene as well in *He Came Down from Heaven.*[12] He goes back also to the age of the Prophets, when "the mystery of pardon" (a chapter heading in *HCD*) began to be unfolded - yet remained obscure, "not yet defined." If it seems clear to us, that is "because we impart into it our second-rate meanings" (*HCD*, 48) - which implies that we too, even now, fail to grasp it fully. Elsewhere he categorises Job's dogmatic friends as the defenders of orthodoxy, but Job as a man who dared to reach towards a new orthodoxy and was rewarded when Truth's own self spoke to him (34-36).

If the Church began as, from one Jewish viewpoint, a heresy, does that imply that heresy needs only to succeed in order to become orthodoxy? Or that orthodoxy must let in some heresy from time to time to avoid stagnating? No, and no. I said "from *one* Jewish viewpoint," because there was at the same time another group of Jews who did not think it a heresy at all. To the Jews who had absorbed what the Jew Jesus taught, and seen something of him during the forty days before he left them, belief in him was just what the Hebrew Scriptures had been pointing towards. There is a world of difference between such an unfolding, though it may challenge accepted views, and a heresy rooted in denial of a basic principle.

The growth of doctrine, as Williams tells the story, occurred naturally and of necessity as the Church spread. One "fundamental question" was "what on

certain points it actually did believe," and it answered this, interestingly enough (according to Williams - though I paraphrase), by doing the sort of thing a sociologist might do, gathering data, taking a survey, "finding out in its Councils what in fact it did - in its various localities - actually believe" (*HCD*, 117-18). They were asking, says Williams, not *what is true?* but *what is it we believe?* "Certainly," he adds, by rapid development of a hypothesis of its nature, the two things became identical, but there was a difference in method and indeed in idea. . . . For the hypothesis was that there was operative within the Church the sacred and eternal reconciliation of all things, which the Church did not and could not deserve. The Church had the limitations of fallen humanity, albeit in process of redemption; yet it also "carried . . . an energy not its own . . . the power of the Reconciler" (118).

There is, it seems to me, something left out of this narrative, or only hinted at. The phrase "development of a hypothesis" suggests strongly that something more was going on than just gathering data about what the Christians in different towns already believed. There is a growth in understanding of what things mean, in the ability of the Church to reason out what its beliefs on one matter may entail in another area, not previously questioned, and to articulate the new insights. That is what we see happening in one of the earliest examples, the Jerusalem Council of which St Luke writes in *Acts* chapter 15 and Charles Williams in *Descent* chapter 1. The question being asked there could not be answered by polling Jerusalem and Antioch and adding up the sum: a Yes and a No don't add up to anything. The raw data in the equation had to be supplemented by something new. I earlier used the phrase "reason out what its beliefs entail," but that, too, is incomplete. There was also, Williams points out, a divine activity. The canonical record quotes the Council's report: such and such a decision "seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." Williams not surprisingly makes quite a lot of this admittedly unusual phrase, and his summation is this: "The Church, or the Spirit in the Church, corrected its original misconceptions" and declared that the Gospel applied equally to Jew and Gentile (*Dove*, 7).

Before that had happened, there must have been some who considered Paul a heretic. He dared to challenge orthodoxy as it was laid down by the mother church in Jerusalem. Yet they could not dispute his credentials - his encounter with Christ, though out of due time, his Christian witness, his reputation. His was the first "of the great train of conversions and illuminations which form part of the history of Christendom - Augustine, Francis, Luther, Ignatius, Wesley, and the rest" (8). So it was orthodoxy that expanded. And it continued to expand through Paul's gift of "regeneration of words," his "great phrases," by which Christian theology came into being: words that "defined the new state of being, . . . of co-inherence, . . . 'He in us and we in him'" (8, 9-10). Even if Paul himself "changed his mind upon certain points" (8), that only adds to our perception, through Williams, of orthodoxy as dynamic.

The Descent of the Dove goes on to give examples of present-day orthodoxies which only came to be articulated in post-apostolic times. To me, one of the most striking concerns Origen, whose Christology was a breakthrough in its day and has been partially preserved, but only partially, in the credal tradition. His teaching that the Son of God is coequal with the Father and yet voluntarily subordinate was later claimed for support by both sides in the Arian controversy (*Dove*, 39). The implications of this relationship within the Godhead as a pattern for human love are clear to Williams (39), but more generally seem to be allowed greater homiletic than dogmatic value.

At this point, we need to return to our question of the relationship between orthodoxy and truth. The abstract noun is dangerous. Of statements and creeds it may be said that they are *true*, adjectivally; but only God is *Truth*, absolutely and wholly. They are true, they mark out certain boundaries and they define what is on the other side of those boundaries as not true, not to be believed; but the boundaries do not totally encircle. Areas are left unmapped. There are aspects of truth that the words simply do not address, areas of inquiry where the boundaries have not had to be drawn - not yet at the point in history where a particular formulation is made, and in some cases not yet even for us. Williams's actual words

on this point, which I have just paraphrased, occur quite early in the *Descent*. It is an important point and will not be the worse for repeating in his words. The context is the pressure being felt from Gnosticism in the second century - a time so early that church-wide formulations do not yet exist: the Canon itself is only now being sorted out. But there is, to be consulted, "the actual belief of the separate churches. It," Williams says, "was on many points yet undefined," and then he adds: "There were speculative points on which it has not yet been defined" (*Dove*, 24). But - so far as the pressing issue of that moment was concerned - everywhere Christians were agreed that their faith did not have room for Gnosticism. One way, then, in which *true* is not to be confused with *Truth* is in its range. There may be other true statements, not yet given the Church's stamp because they deal with questions that haven't yet come up. Or, to be sure, other *false* statements, for the same reason not yet branded false.

Another reason the adjective is less than the noun is the problem of language itself. Williams writes of the struggle at Nicaea to define "the most Secret," the One beyond our full knowing, in "infelicitous human words" (*Dove*, 52) - *essentia, substantia, persana, ousia, hypostasis* and so on. He goes on to tell of the revolt against those words, an "immature" and "romantic" reaction yet a "natural" one, because so plainly "at times . . . the words seem only words" (53). Further, the incapacity of *language* to capture Truth is aggravated by the difficulties that speakers of *different* languages have in conveying their thoughts to one another without distortion—or worse. As Williams explains in *Descent*, "meanings orthodox in the language of the West or the East easily became heretical in translation" (79). Still, says Williams, to reject the credal formulas because they are "only words" is to see only the *human* side of what the Church is. As a *divine* institution, the Church has been awesomely allowed to construct truth (adjectivally speaking).

I put it this way because I would so far concede to that contemporary school which holds all so-called truth to be socially "constructed" (whether from psychological or economic or other kinds of needs: accounts differ). Yet it is no real

concession, except to agree that the formulations we call true are ultimately contingent and conditional. It is no concession because I continue to maintain 1) that there is an "unconditional" (*Dove*, 220), noncontingent Truth, who created us and all that is; and 2) in the particular case of the Church, that that divine Being participates in the construction: the Holy Spirit's work of creation continues, using weak human instruments.

This accords, I believe, with the way Williams tells his history. Hear what he says happened when the Church began "organising itself for [its] process in time." "Perhaps inevitably," there "followed . . . the disappearance of the extraordinary spiritual impulses. It may be that our Lord the Spirit discontinued them; one is almost driven to that view on observing how the Church discouraged them. The very nature of the Church involves the view that, apart from human sin, what happened was right. . . . The Blessed One will conform his actions - at least, to a degree - to the decisions of his creatures. If the Church determined on something, then that something should have been or should be true" (*Dove*, 30). He doesn't quite use today's jargon of "constructing," but the idea is there.

This brings us to a succession of further thoughts about the nature and the claims of orthodoxy. First, the continuing refinement of orthodox belief sometimes was accompanied by pressures not entirely disinterested. We may well believe that the first Council in Jerusalem was driven by a desire to articulate the Gospel more precisely and enhance the Church's witness to it. But once organisation, as Williams repeatedly calls it, entered the picture (and the sociologists would surely be pleased with this emphasis), another motive inevitably is present: to maintain the institution, to maintain its authority, that is, the authority of its leaders. At best, this would be a means to the purer end of understanding and witness. But that could turn into mere rationalisation; the maintenance could become an end in itself; and after Constantine changed the Church's relation to power, such temptations grew stronger. "Insincerity became Christian" (*Dove*, 50).

But let us swing the pendulum again and consider the same thing from the

viewpoint of the Church as divine, Christ's own body. Charles Williams speaks of Origen, who, "like all intelligent readers then as now, realised that he needed a check upon his own brain" - surely Williams thought of Sir Thomas Browne among those intelligent readers[13] - "and he found it, where all Christians have found it, in the universal decisions of the Church. . . . However right a man's ideas, they were bound to go wrong if he nourished them by himself. The value of dogma, besides its record of fact, is the opportunity it gives for the single mind to enter the Communion of Saints - say, of Intelligences" (*Dove,* 38-39).

Flying across the centuries to the verge of our own, the idea is repeated: "Christendom cannot fundamentally admit the right of an Opposition (to its dogmas) to exist; to refuse the Co-inherence is to separate oneself from the nature of things" (217). Williams now is about to tell of Kierkegaard and his revolt against a church that insisted too strongly (he felt) on this mystical prerogative. "Reviving and militant Christendom denied the 'right' to hold false opinions. Unfortunately a dying and stagnant Christendom was always saying the same thing" (219). But we have got too far ahead; further thoughts are required, to prepare us for this part of the story.

Second, as a result of the pressure to define orthodoxy in such a way as to ensure stability, some things that were true might be suppressed because they were thought dangerous or found threatening. Williams seems sad when he tells of the "fad[ing]" of an early "experiment" in asexual companionship which was a victim "of 'the weaker brethren,' those innocent sheep who by mere volume of imbecility have trampled over many delicate and attractive flowers in Christendom" (*Dove,* 11, 13). He speculates that the abolition of this practice, together with the attitudes responsible for its abolition, may be connected with the Church's repeated failures in the realm of sexual ethics, and especially the loss of "any really active tradition of marriage itself as a way of the soul" (14). Williams cites other, similar events: how the new idea of romantic love beginning in the eleventh century was, "naturally but regrettably, cold-shouldered by the ecclesiastical authorities";[14] how in the thirteenth century, after Lateran, with more pow-

erful "organisation" to enforce belief, "the practice of the Co-inherence seems driven back more and more secretly into the hearts of the . . . few" (*Dove*, 117); how the zeal of the late medieval Church to stamp out heresy left it deaf to "the cry for Reform" (161).

We are here dealing with a narrower sort of orthodoxy than that of the early ecumenical Councils, and it becomes evident that, in Williams's thinking, true beliefs were not by being suppressed rendered untrue. They might even still have their part to play in the Spirit's work in the Church: we recall here what was just said of "the practice of the Co-inherence," driven underground. We may recall also some of the less familiar doctrines that Williams found attractive - less familiar only because the Church does not emphasise them, but not less true for that. (Perhaps these are what some have in mind when they call Williams heterodox.) There is Clement of Alexandria's insistence that Christ was crucified "for the sake of each of us" (quoted in *Dove*, 36). There is the idea that in the divine economy the past itself can be altered by present actions, like repentance in Dante's Purgatory (see *Dove*, 137) and like the exchange of joy for someone's fear in one of Williams's novels. There is the idea for which he cites Duns Scotus but might equally have gone back to Irenaeus, "that the Incarnation would have happened, had there been no Fall" (122). This is a point on which Aquinas prevailed over Scotus; still, says Williams, it remains "an opinion permissible to the faithful . . . that the Incarnation is the point of creation, and the divine 'reason' for it" ("Natural Goodness": *Image*, 76). Most important perhaps is the compelling idea of the divinisation of our humanity, which Williams and others find plain in Scripture and the Creeds, but which is very troublesome to many simple Christian souls. Its orthodoxy is beyond question - yet many question it.

For Williams, even heretics, outside the boundary though they may be on some one important point, might nonetheless have their contribution to make. He points out that the Montanists were orthodox in many ways, the first to use the term *homo-ousion*, finally endorsed at Nicaea, and the first (it is said) to call the Holy Spirit God: "if so, he permitted himself to be named in schism and defined

by an error" (*Dove*, 31, 34). The doctrine of Substitution and Exchange, "almost the profoundest secret of all that the Church held" (44), arose out of opposition to St Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. It was by a Monophysite Christian in 533 that the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius were first brought to wider Christian attention. They gained an "authority almost apostolic" and were "admired," though also "distrusted," for Dionysius himself was only just "within . . . orthodoxy" (60-61). And it must be admitted that in *The Place of the Lion* Williams rather enjoyed playing with Dionysius's notions about the celestial hierarchies - notions which, his researches revealed, had in their own day rival theories to contend with, and those theories, though they came to be deemed heretical, are really just interesting variants.[15]

Such facts are interesting, but in themselves no more interesting, as I see it, than this additional fact: that Williams takes every opportunity he can to mention matters of this sort, reminding us how the wind blows where it will. He never says that heretics cannot be Christians; there is no tone of disapproval when he mentions that among the barbarians absorbed into the Church in the waning days of the Empire and after, some were Arian (*Dove*, 81), or that it was largely Nestorian Christians who first carried the Gospel to the Far East (207). They might not be in communion with Rome or Byzantium, but that is another and lesser matter. Quite early, he says, the undivided Church made it clear that "no idea" may be considered "a primal and necessary condition of Christianity. . . . All doctrine, and all doctors, have been relegated into subordination" (7). If devoted followers of Christ have happened to get their theology not quite straight (*ortho–*), especially if misled by their instructors, that possibly might diminish the Christian experience they could otherwise have, but can it cut them out of the Church invisible? Even after Nicaea, "if the Holy Spirit had there controlled the voice, he did not attempt to silence the voices, of Christendom" (63). The Holy Spirit working in the Church does not seem to be confined to the formal institutional structures.

Williams even goes so far as to write, "The Church owes more to heretics

than she is ever likely (on this earth) to admit." The immediate reference here is to "a convinced and rhetorical heretic named David Herbert Lawrence," who, operating (as he thought) from entirely outside Christianity, and driven (as he felt) entirely to oppose it, nonetheless had some perceptions close to those of Christianity. Regrettably, the Christians "whom he did know were incapable of explaining. They had not attended to the Athanasian Creed . . . that great Ode."[16]

A third observation is this: that the more Christendom lost its original unity - the great division between East and West comes to mind, but it is not the only one even then, and there have been many since - the more it was possible for opposing views to exist side by side and neither be, strictly, outside orthodoxy. On St Augustine, for example, Williams reports two views, that "he came to redress (or, as some have thought, to upset for ever) the balance of the Church" (*Dove*, 63). Williams does not commit himself to either. Augustine's own tortured spiritual journey blinded him, he says, to other varieties of religious experience; to the *anima naturaliter Christiana* (64), the "once-born" that William James describes. Thus he is "danger[ous]" though never more than just on the brink of heresy. "Formally Augustine did not err; but informally?" (64). As for his noted opponent, the Celt Pelagius, he too, says Williams, "was orthodox enough" (65). "Christendom never quite committed itself to Augustine; it has spent centuries escaping from the phrases of Augustine. But without Augustine it might have ceased to be Christendom" (70). Then there is the Filioque clause. Are you to say that God the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son or from the Father alone? Both views are orthodox - depending on where you live. Clearly the concept of orthodoxy itself is diminished when such distinctions take the upper hand. As for the Eucharist, that vital centre of Christian practice and devotion, for 1200 years not much attention was given to defining it. It had been "accepted" but not "discussed." East and West were essentially agreed, "whatever [the] variations of phraseology or hesitations over ritual." It was anyhow a matter for "only the most subtle theologians." But then from the Lateran Council comes "a lyric of theology" on the subject, and one view is given official sanction - which suddenly makes another view "doubtful" (113-15).

Mention of the Lateran Council reminds us of Williams's account of the rise of Rome's authority in the Church. After the Empire fell, the See of Rome was the most prestigious in the West (being the only Apostolic one). Hence more and more Rome's views were the "test of orthodoxy" even though "saints and theologians often disagreed with her and sometimes denounced her." The Roman bishops "received . . . appeals to which at last they were asserting a divine right" (*Dove*, 74-75).

Finally, beginning in what is now called the Early Modern period the Church fragmented more and more. What is remarkable about Williams's treatment of this last part of the history is his even-handedness. He devotes most of a chapter to Luther, Loyola, and Calvin and says of the last two, "That those two masters should have been opposed was, humanly speaking, tragic" (173). He judiciously values not only Montaigne, who "kept orthodoxy all his life, . . . a deliberate orthodoxy" and practised doubt as a mode of belief (191, 192-93), and Pascal, that "friend and intimate of Jansenists" (199) who argued passionately for belief, and Kierkegaard, whose "life of scepticism was rooted in God" and whose attack on the Church, which he considered "guilty," "was in the best tradition of Christ[ian] prophe[cy]" (213, 214) - but even the atheist Voltaire, who "attacked the Church - and not in the name of Christ," but whose "blows . . . recalled her to her better self - that is, to the Holy Ghost" (201). He put together in one sentence Wesley and Newman as "two great schismatics" through whose efforts "fervour awoke again" (215), and in one paragraph Plymouth Brethren, the Salvation Army, Lourdes, and "the practice of more frequent communion" (221) as instances of the Spirit's work.

If it is the case, as Williams's handling of the matter seems to say, that we have now many orthodoxies (as we certainly have many churches), that there are many different "takes" on Truth, all oriented around a core of central Christian belief but none having the whole in view, and that the One Spirit continues at work in each in the ways that the peculiar genius of each will allow - if this is so, a proposal that Williams makes seems as timely now as when it was written

nearly sixty years ago. "The separations in Christendom remain," he writes, but there also remains the unity that the bare term *Christian* implies: the coinherence of separated parts by which the Church can still be called one. Let us then, from our different angles on Truth, "'exchange' our ignorance" (*Dove*, 232). A less careful writer might have said "exchange our bits of knowledge," but that would be an invitation to arrogance. The Church has had enough imperialism. "It is between our ignorances that our courteous Lord might cause exchange to lie, till the exchange itself became an invocation of the adorable Spirit who has so often deigned to instruct and correct the Church by voices without as well as within." Only such a triumph of ecumenism could, paradoxically, lead us to the needed "last virtue . . . humility" (232).

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Notes

1. *The Rhetoric of Vision: Essays on Charles Williams*, ed. Charles Huttar and Peter Schakel (Lewisburg, Pa: Bucknell University Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1996).

2. It is a charge not all that rare. An early example is H. D. Hanshell, "Charles Williams: A Heresy Hunt," *Month* n.s. 9 (1953): 14-25.

3. *Christian Discrimination* (London: Sheldon Press, 1940), 67.

4. *He Came Down from Heaven* (1938; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 117 (this edition hereafter identified as *HCD*).

5. See *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *unorthodox*.

6. *SOED*, s.v. *heresy*.

7. *The Descent of the Dove* (1939; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 3 (this

edition hereafter identified as *Dove*).

8. Gnosticism: *Dove*, 22-26; Manicheism ("the newer Gnosticism"): 55-57; Nestorianism: 70; Arianism: 50-53.

9. "Natural Goodness," *Theology* (1941), in CW, *The Image of the City*, ed. Anne Ridler (London: Oxford University Press, 1958; hereafter referred to as *Image*), 76.

When the Words came Alive

Eileen Mable reviews a performance of Charles Williams's *The Masque of the Manuscript* and *The Masque of Perusal* given in Oxford on Saturday 16th May 1998.

The Masque of the Manuscript (1927) and *The Masque of Perusal* (1929) are among the least known of Charles Williams's writings.

This is not surprising: they were written for performance by staff of the Oxford University Press in the Library of Amen House, London, as an entertainment for and about friends. Afterwards 100 copies of each Masque were printed for private circulation only. They have never been reprinted, and I know only of one other performance, in the 1950s.

Last month the Masques were enacted once more, and most successfully, at the Oxford University Press. Could either Charles Williams or Hubert Foss, who wrote the music for both Masques, ever have dreamed of a performance of such splendour and professional excellence?

The occasion was to celebrate the legacy of Hubert Foss (first Manager of the Press's Music Department) and to mark the Department's 75th Anniversary. The initiative for the evening came from Mrs Diana Sparkes, Hubert Foss's daughter. It was a worthy commemoration of her father as it was also of Charles Williams.

The Masque of the Manuscript concerns the adventures of The Manuscript from her first arrival, in deplorable condition, at the Library of Amen House through to her production as The Book and a place on the shelves of the Library.

A place is chosen for you, O new-comer,

Among the happiest places upon earth.

The Masque of Perusal shows the subsequent adventures of The Book and her purchase by an author, after which she becomes The Thought in his mind. On her later return to the Library, she finds its occupants weary, cynical and so obsessed with the detail of their work that they have lost sight of the reason and end for which the Press exists. The Thought challenges them - "What serves the Graal?", and harmony and order are at length restored. There is a Graal Procession of appropriate symbolic objects - inkpot and pen, type, paper, periodicals.

As without, ah so within,
  As below, ah so above;
To its incarnation kin
  See each holy virtue move;
Steadfast, though the public rail,
Shine the hallows of the Graal.

All this is but the barest outline. It shows nothing of the humour, wit and affectionate mockery that lightens the Masques. The gentle humour with which The Manuscript first introduces herself is typical.

To fill up a certain *lacuna* my aim,
I am called *A Short Treatise on Syrian Nouns*
As used in the Northern and Sub-Northern Towns
Five Hundred BC, with two maps and three charts:
By Walter Lackpenny, poor Master of Arts.

But alongside the light-heartedness, there is a great seriousness, introduced early on in the hauntingly beautiful Carol of Amen House.

O'er the toil that is given to do,
  O'er the search and the grinding pain,

Seen by the holy few,
Perfection glimmers again.
O dreamed in an eager youth,
O known between friend and friend,
Seen by the seekers of truth,
Lo, peace and the perfect end!

The Carol was for me one of the shining moments of the evening's performance. Another came with The Thought's challenge "What serves the Graal?" and the reply "I answer: labour and purity and peace."

This is Charles Williams's world, remember, and we should not be surprised by the juxtaposition of humour and high seriousness. The familiar themes are here: the reality of death, work and its purpose, the invisible discerned through the visible, relationship and interdependence, the challenge and the serenity of the Graal.

The Masques are a well-wrought collaboration between Charles Williams and Hubert Foss, friends as well as colleagues, who effected a most felicitous marriage of words and music. This was apparent in this performance despite the unsuitability for its purpose of the available piano.

The production was faithful to the 'twenties origin of the Masques but combined this with a contemporary freshness of presentation. The choreography was effective and the performers defined their parts well. In particular, Antonia Cviic as Phillida (the part originally written for Phyllis Jones, the Librarian of Amen House who was so influential in Charles Williams's life and work) sang and acted with authority and a memorable grace and poise.

The Masques are potent on the printed page but on a May evening in Oxford the words came alive.

Readers may like to refer back to Anne Ridler's article in Newsletter 84.

Charles Williams and the Internet

Andrew Williams outlines the development of the Internet as a medium for communication and considers the relevance of this technology for the Charles Williams Society.

Given his fascination with the interconnectedness of disparate elements and the invisible sharing of human experience, Charles Williams would surely have been intrigued by the remarkable technological development represented by the Internet. The transfer of information and ideas between millions of people all over the world, along mysterious conduits through the earth and air, could not have failed to have made an impression on a mind steeped in the realities of supernatural exchange. What is certain is that Charles Williams, or anyone else for that matter living half a century ago, could not have predicted the astonishing and dramatic development of the Internet as one of the cornerstones of late 20th century global culture.

So what is the Internet and why is it important? Even to its regular users today the Internet is somewhat difficult to conceive. It is, however, probably best defined as a assemblage of computer networks distributed across the world that enables the sharing of information. Originally designed for military purposes in the 1960s and adopted by universities in Europe and North America during the 1970s the Internet is now used by an enormously diverse range of people and organisations. It is estimated that around 40 million people world-wide currently have access to the Internet. And the electronic superhighway, as the media likes to refer to the Internet, continues to extend its influence into diverse areas of society as the number of people "on-line" (connected to the Internet) goes on growing.

Those with access to the Internet use it for different purposes. Perhaps the most readily appreciated application of the Internet is **electronic mail** (email).

This enables users to dispatch letters, memos and any other form of communication, including pictures and sound recordings, to recipients anywhere in the world and virtually instantaneously. An extension of email is the **bulletin board** or **newsgroup** where groups of participants can interact with each other simultaneously by sending and responding to text messages and even live video images. Another feature of the Internet is a facility that enables a computer to gain access "remotely" to another computer and to read, copy and edit files of information in the same way they would on their own computer.

Although these Internet applications are all exciting, the most important and rapidly growing aspect of the Internet is the **World Wide Web**, usually abbreviated simply to the Web. The Web is the name given to the plethora of organisations who have computers on the Internet and display information relating to their field of interest that can be accessed, or "browsed" by users of the Internet. The Web is used to communicate information relating to an enormously wide range of subjects. Organisations that have set up their own Web "site" include government departments, commercial companies, educational establishments, charities and voluntary organisations, tourist centres, pop groups, religious bodies, amateur societies and even enthusiastic individuals.

Given the dramatic increases in computing speed and functionality over recent years, coupled with an equally significant decline in the cost of this technology, the meteoric growth of the Internet is hardly surprising. Imagine a literature student seeking to find works of reference on an obscure nineteenth century German poet. Using her home computer, our student types the name of the poet into the search facility on the World Wide Web and identifies a Web site dedicated to the poet. Here she is able to read a short biography of the poet, copy a bibliography of works of relevant literary criticism and identify the leading scholars actively involved in research in her field of interest. From this list our student emails a senior lecturer in Romantic German literature at Heidelburg University with some questions on the early works of the poet. Within a day she is delighted to have received a response and attached to the incoming email is the text of a recently published paper on her topic of interest together with details of a

discussion group convened in Australia which will provide further stimulation and interest. This is simply one of a myriad different applications of the Internet in action.

The scenario described above could also apply to anyone seeking information about Charles Williams. There is now a Web site dedicated to Williams, a discussion group and academics with an interest in Williams (including many contributors to the Society's newsletter) can be contacted by email. Using a search facility on the World Wide Web and typing the words "Charles Williams" produces a tantalising list of references to Web sites. One such search generated 18 references, or "hits".

Unfortunately for those interested in Charles Williams the English poet

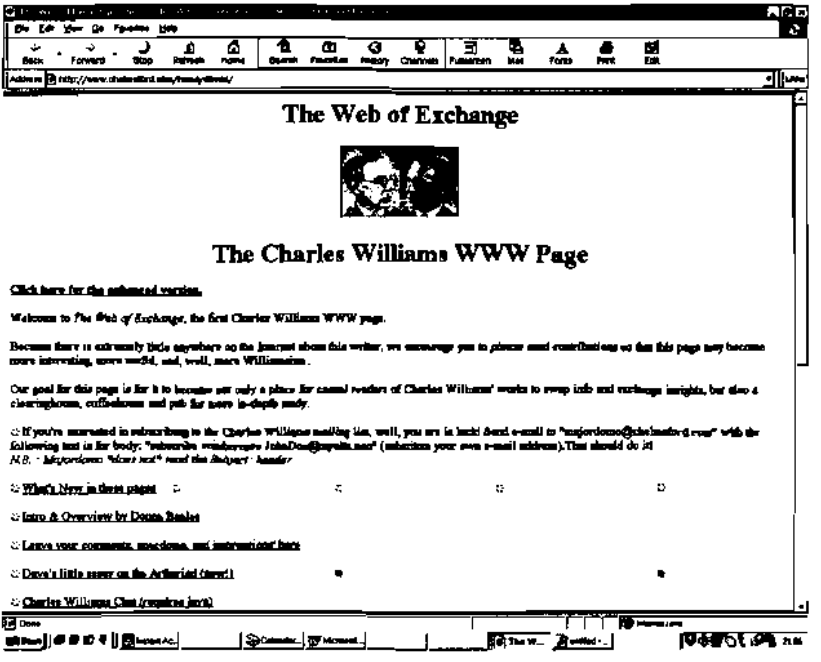

Figure 1. The opening or "home" page of the Web of Exchange site on the World Wide Web.

most of these were spurious, referring to other individuals with the same name or sites containing the two words in an unrelated context. However, a site called "The Web of Exchange" was established on the World Wide Web in September 1995 by American Charles Williams enthusiasts, Dave Davis, Colin Davis, and Donna Beales (see figure 1).

As with all sites on the Web, The Web of Exchange has a unique address which identifies it in a similar way to a building and a postal address. The address for this Charles Williams site is:

http://www.chelmsford.com/home/daved/index.htm

The site contains a number of features that will be of interest to members of the Society. These include bibliographies of works by Williams and about him, a short biography, an essay (see figure 2), a discussion forum for the exchange of

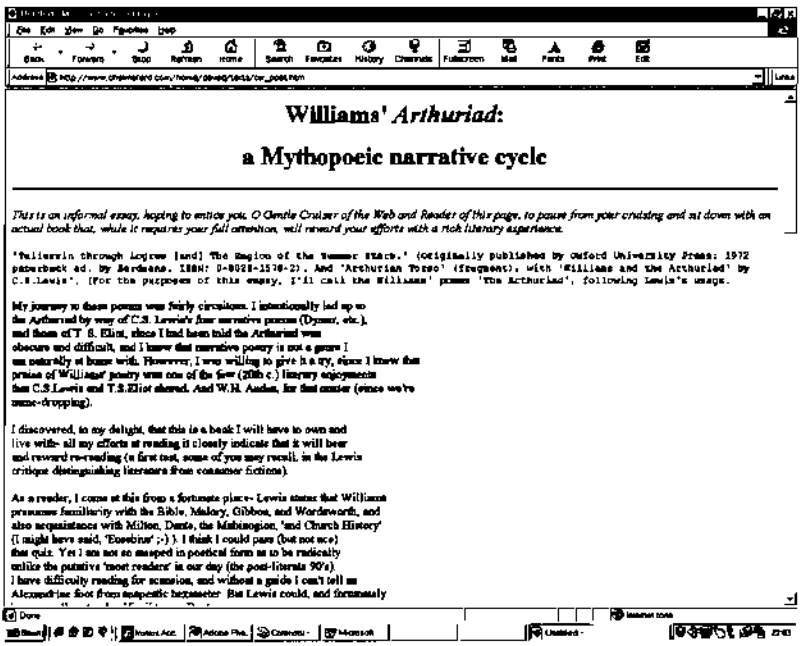

Figure 2. One of the pages on the Web of Exchange: an essay on Charles Williams.

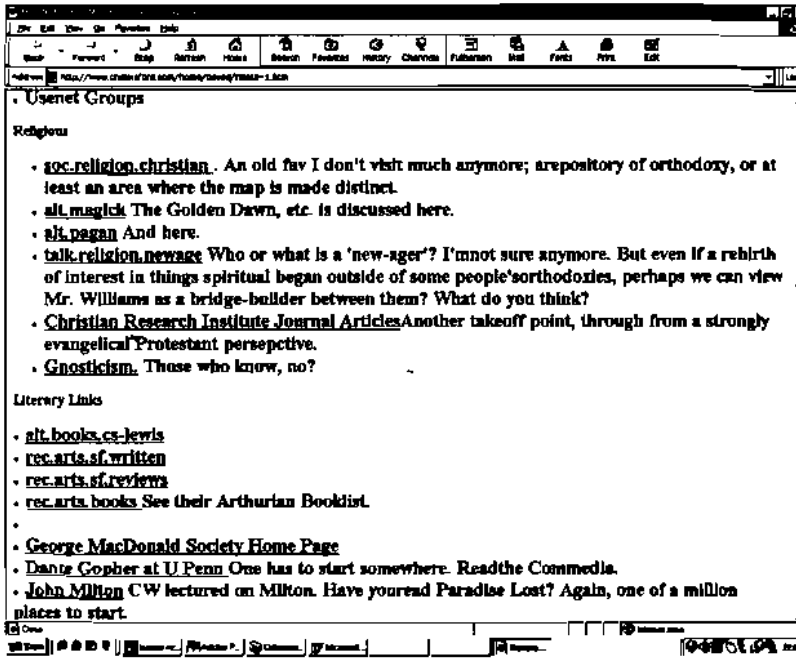

Figure 3. Examples of other internet sites that can be accessed from the Web of Exchange.

ideas and questions about Charles Williams and links to other related Internet addresses. Amongst these links are Web sites dedicated to George MacDonald and Dante and discussion groups focussing on other religious or literary themes (see figure 3).

A second Web site of interest on the Internet is the "Reading Guide to All Hallows' Eve and Works of Charles Williams". This is located at:

http://ernie.bgsc.edu/~edwards/WMS.html

This is a single page of text with an outline of Charles Williams's life and work and some study questions on the novel *All Hallows Eve*.

Sites such as those described above certainly provide a useful starting

point for those with a particular regard for Charles Williams. However, they offer only a limited perspective on Williams and in comparison to other literary figures there is a paucity of Internet material on Charles Williams (for example, there are 15 sites dedicated to GK Chesteron). There would therefore seem to be scope for another resource on the Internet to accommodate the considerable interest that exists worldwide for the life and works of Charles Williams.

For this reason the Charles Williams Society is planning to establish its own Web site to develop a British-based information source. In addition to general material about Charles Williams and other related subjects, such a site would also provide specific details relating to the work of the Society. This might include extracts and lists of back issues from the Society's newsletter, details of forthcoming events and contributions from Society members. It is anticipated that this would help to raise the profile of the Society, attract new members and contribute to the aims of the Society in celebrating Charles Williams by providing a forum for the exchange of views and information about him.

The Society hopes to establish its Web site later this year. I will be responsible for the construction of the site and any suggestions for its content and format would be greatly welcomed. These should be directed to the editor, Mark, who can be contacted at his home address (see page 2). Alternatively, Mark and I can be contacted by email:

Mark Brend: **mbrend@compuserve.com**

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